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ABSTRACT

The paper examines an assessment method for measuring students' writing performance. Does Primary Trait Scoring reliably and validly accomplish the administrative, instructional, and evaluative purposes of the writing assessment? The Primary Trait Scoring guide has a few underlying principles: identification of qualities of effective writing; formulation of different criteria for different tasks; recognition of variables that affect students' writing; and examination of students' performance on a variety of writing tasks/use of multiple samples. Primary Trait Scoring is based on the idea that different modes of discourse place different demands on the writer in terms of audience and purpose. Its focused nature means that scorings can be replicated quite closely, and this approach can provide diagnostic information not available with the other scoring guides. The major drawback to this system is that papers are scored for one specific primary trait although the guide may have secondary traits. If a school district seeks in-depth data about students' performance in a specific discourse, then Primary Trait Scoring is valuable. If, on the other hand, broader information is sought, then Primary Trait Scoring would not be appropriate unless provisions were made for evaluating secondary traits as well. (Contains 31 references and 3 appendices.) (JA)

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PRIMARY TRAIT SCORING: A DIRECT ASSESSMENT OPTION

Time: **Friday, November 19, 1999**
11:30-12:45 P.M.

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ABSTRACT

PRIMARY TRAIT SCORING: A DIRECT ASSESSMENT OPTION FOR EDUCATORS

This paper attempts to address this question: **Does Primary Trait Scoring reliably and validly accomplish our administrative, instructional, and evaluative purposes?** To aptly respond to this question, four common issues, that are frequently associated with Primary Trait Scoring ,are examined:

- Primary Trait Scoring Procedure
- Primary Trait Scoring Assumptions
- Primary Trait Scoring Strengths
- Primary Trait Scoring Limitations.

Weighing the limitations and advantages of the Primary Trait System, educational institutions may use this optional direct assessment system if they require an in-depth portrait of the key trait that their writing tasks are measuring. An extensive bibliography is provided along with sample writing tasks and scoring guides used by some schools and colleges in their research on Primary Trait Scoring.

PRIMARY TRAIT SCORING:
A DIRECT ASSESSMENT OPTION FOR EDUCATORS

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PRIMARY TRAIT SCORING: A DIRECT ASSESSMENT OPTION

INTRODUCTION

The assessment of students' writing stands at the center of new educational directions because of our genuine concern about the quality of writing at all educational levels: K-higher education. As educators, our ability to address this concern will depend, to a great degree, on our decision to make valid, useful judgments about our students' writing. Although major advances have been made in the measurement of students' writing in recent years, much of the writing assessment is still determined by norm-referenced, standardized tests that measure only students' editorial skills determined by their choice of the best sentence and their recognition of correct grammar, usage, and mechanics. That is, the score the student receives has meaning only in reference to the scores obtained by other students, those in the norm group.

This indirect assessment method does not validly and reliably measure students' writing performance. As a result of recent developments in theory and research on the assessment of students' writing, the trend seems to be moving toward a more promising alternative to the standardized, multiple-choice tests: direct assessment measures that require students to demonstrate through actual performance their competence by actually composing.

If we examine the current procedures for direct evaluation of students' writing, we can infer that the writing assessment serves multiple purposes. However, Charles Cooper and Lee Odell (1977) identify three distinct uses:

1. **Administrative,** which entails the (1) predicting of students' grades in English courses, (2) placing, tracking, or exempting of students from English courses, and (3) assigning of grades to specific pieces of writing.

2. **Instructional,** which (1) diagnoses students' writing problems and (2) guides and focuses feedback to student writers as they progress through an English course.

3. **Research/Evaluative,** which (1) measures students' growth as writers over a specific period of time, (2) determines the effectiveness of a writing program, (3) measures group differences in writing performance, and (4) scores writing in order to study possible correlates of writing performance (pp. viii-ix).

Thus, to determine the most effective administrative, instructional, and evaluative uses of direct measures of writing assessment, we need to examine some of the commonly used scoring methods: **primary trait, analytical, and holistic.** However, this paper will address one question pertaining to only Primary Trait Scoring: **Does Primary Trait Scoring reliably and validly accomplish our identified administrative, instructional, and evaluative purposes?**

This question may be aptly answered if we examine four major Primary Traits Scoring issues: (l) its procedure, (2) its assumptions, (3) its strengths, and (3) its limitations.

I. **Primary Trait Scoring Procedure:** ***Primary Trait Scoring guide was developed more than 20 years ago by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a congressionally mandated project of the U.S. Dept. of Education. Its commissioner is responsible for carrying out the NAEP project through competitive awards to qualified organizations.***

The Primary Trait Scoring procedure entails the following:

- **Analysis of Writing Task:** It begins with an analysis of the **assignment** or **task** that prompted the writing. One needs to know the "apparent requirements imposed on the writer by the specific **audience** and **purposes** specified by the writing task"(Odell & Cooper, 1980,p.39).

- **Analysis of Writing Performance:** Then "one turns to the **writing**, trying to determine whether the writers interpreted the task as the evaluator did and trying to identify the important features of **writing** done in response to the assignment"(p.39).

- **Formulation of Primary Traits: Next,one** "formulates a set of **primary traits(e.g.: *organization)***, features which seem especially appropriate for the specific task at hand"(p.39).That is,readers are not asked to rank a paper in relation to other papers in the sample; instead, raters are instructed to ask this question:

  > **To what extent does this paper display characteristics that are important for achieving the assigned purpose for the specified audience? (p. 39)**

That is, the **Primary Trait** represents the over-riding features that enable the writer to meet the purpose of the specific writing task. For example," if **coherence** were the primary trait, a coherent paper would achieve a high score despite major problems with grammar, mechanics, and usage. Also, if **sentence complexity** were the primary trait, an incoherent and confused paper could score at the top, as long as it contained enough complex sentences"(White, 1994,p.232).

- **Scoring Scale:** Finally, one designs a scoring scale which conveys the possible range of responses the task will generate. **[See Appendices.]** The scale delineates the needed features for success with a given rhetorical task. Besides, it articulates well its rhetorical assumptions because "instead of evaluating students' writing in a vacuum, it evaluates that writing as a response to a specific task with a specific purpose communicated to the writer through carefully written instructions"(James Raymond, 1982, p.402).

II. **Primary Trait Assumptions:**

The Primary Trait Scoring guide has a few assumptions that are well documented in rhetorical theory and composition research. Some of its underlying principles include:

- **Identification of qualities of effective writing:** We can identify some of the qualities of writing that are important for success on a given task. For example, we can assume that an effective paper (1) engages the reader, (2) shows strengths in all areas of composition: clear, logical ideas; careful effective word choice; no serious errors in grammar, usage, and

mechanics; concentration on the main purpose, with strong development, adequate support, and logical organization.

- **Formulation of different Criteria for Different Tasks**: Different tasks – *expository, descriptive, narrative, and persuasive* – may have to be judged by different criteria. That is, Primary Trait Scoring rejects the assumption that "writing is writing," that all writing may be judged by a single set of criteria (e.g.: quality of ideas, organization, and so on). Thus, Primary Trait Scoring claims that different rhetorical tasks (that is, writing addressed to different **audiences** and intended to accomplish different **purposes)** require different rhetorical strategies, for strategies that may be important to one task may be relatively unimportant to a different sort of task (Lloyd-Jones, 1977,p.38).

- **Recognition of Variables that Affect Students' Writing:** There is considerable evidence that writing by the same student will vary depending on the (1) **context of the writing** (Sanders & Littlefield 1975); (2) **audience** (Crowhurst & Piche, 1979); (3) **students' interest and motivation** (Evans 1979; Sanders & Littlefield 1975; Smith 1980); (4) **familiarity with content** (Hilgers 1982; Lloyd-Jones 1977; Melton & McCready 1982); (5) **mode** (Crowhurst, 1980; Spandel 1980; Dixon 1981; White 1980); (6) **topic** (Evans 1979; Gilbert 1980).

- **Examination of Students' Performance on a Variety of Writing Tasks/Use of Multiple Samples:** Primary Trait Scoring also claims that "skill in performing one sort of writing task may not imply equal skill in performing a different sort of task"(Odell & Cooper, 1980, p.40). That is, we cannot pretend to have a comprehensive understanding of someone's overall "writing ability" if we have only **one** sample of that person's writing or even if we have several samples of that person's performance on only one type of writing task.Therefore,we cannot make claims about writing ability until we have examined students' performance on a variety of writing tasks (Melton & McCready,1982).The evidence suggests that instructors and test administrators cannot justify one-sample writing tests, no matter how well the topic or prompt is developed, pilot-tested, or scored (Carlman 1985, p. 16).

III. **Strengths of Primary Trait Scoring:**

Primary Trait Scoring has a few advantages that are well-documented in rhetorical theory and composition research. Some of the advantages include:

- **Importance of Audience and Purpose:** It is based on the current discourse theory regarding the importance of **audience** and **purpose. For example,** Mullis (1980) explains that audience is central in Primary Trait Scoring:

  > The rationale underlying Primary Trait Scoring is that writing is done in terms of an audience. Particular writing tasks require particular approaches if they are successful. The approach used by the writer to reach and affect his audience will be the most important –the primary – trait of a piece of writing (p.18).

- **Provision of Specific Feedback/Diagnostic Uses**: It asks raters to identify specific features of writing that students may be taught to incorporate into subsequent writing tasks of a similar kind (Lloyd-Jones 1977, p.32). For example, if the primary trait score indicates that a student has done poorly in organizing his text, results of that scoring would let us make this sort of comment to the student on that one trait. According to Odell (1993), it"provides students . . . with judgments about the success of their writing and . . . with information about some of the strategies they are using in trying to do a particular type of writing"(p.297). That is, it helps give our students a certain amount of useful information. If a student asks why a specific paper received a certain score, the rater can mention some things the student has done and also some of the things the student needs do the next time he or she does this type of writing (Odell, 298;Burkhalter, 1993, p.9; Murphy, 1996,p.6).

- **Importance of Specific Criteria:** It is "criterion-based." That is, a writer's success at a specific task is measured against **specific criteria** and has nothing to do with the set of papers of which it may be a part (Faigley, Cherry, Jollife, and Skinner, 1985,pp.103-117). These criteria involve the expectations of teachers and students and also the features of a specific paper or set of papers (Odell, 1993, p. 2999).

- **Possibility of Replicating:** The guide's specificity enables scorings to be replicated and topics to be reused, thus offering schools a means of assessing school programs and exploring student growth. That is, Patricia Gilbert (1980) views the focused nature of the scoring guide as having content validity in that they clearly specify not only the specific task but also the specific criteria by which writers' success at fulfilling the task can be assessed (pp.93-94).

- **Possibility of High Interrater Reliability:** With thorough training in using the Primary Trait Scoring guides, readers can achieve **high inter-reader consistency.** For instance, Mullis reports a .90 interrater reliability score in her 1980-study (p.23).

- **Reliable & Valid Instrument:** Several studies have shown that Primary Trait Scoring is a reliable and valid instrument for assessing the writing of students.

1. For example, in Anne Hawks and James Cross' 1987 study, Primary Trait Scoring was adapted to assess the quality of these writing traits: mode (primary trait); organization (secondary trait); & mechanics/grammar (the tertiary trait) by elementary school students (pp.1-13). The validity and reliability of the scoring system was confirmed through the judgment of content experts and by correlating obtained scores with relevant indices of verbal ability (p.l3). Also, it provides reliable and valid data about individual differences among students and student differences by traits. Since Hawks and Cross' (1987) use of Primary Trait Scoring has been found to be reliable and valid for students in Grades 2-5, there is a real possibility that it can be expanded to district-wide assessment.

2. Some English Departments use Primary Trait Scoring as a means of identifying and placing students in appropriate composition courses. According to Holderer (1995), the essay placement tests provide Departments with valuable data for tracking students; however, faculty have often found that these same tests often misplace students. Thus, "numbers of students deemed proficient by these tests often cannot complete the tasks required by the regular composition course, while at the same time others deemed non-proficient bypass advisement, enroll in regular composition classes, and pass these classes with grades of C or better (p.ll).

Also, Holderer claims that while Primary Trait Scoring provided English departments with a more reliable evaluation of writing ability than the indirect multiple-choice tests, these methods have frequently produced unsatisfactory results when English departments have tried to use them as the sole means for identifying and placing students in courses (pp.ll-12), unless the scoring guide "identifies those patterns of discourse frequently generated by ... students as they attempt to compose their ideas on paper"(p.l2) and use "basic writing fluency" as the primary trait: the domain to be measured.

Using a modified Primary Trait Scoring system at a community college in Kansas, Holderer (1995) claims that there is a moderate correlation (.45) between the results generated by the Modified Primary Trait Scoring guide and the final grades in the English courses in which the students were placed (p.14). Although a correlation coefficient of .45 is moderate, it was significantly better than the .27 that existed between the multiple-choice test (ASSET) and the final grades in their English courses. That is, the Modified Primary Trait Scoring guide is reliable and valid, according to Holderer (1995) who claims that "the test has reinforced the idea that students are placed on the basis of their performance in writing, not on the basis of the rules of grammar. More importantly, students are not misplaced as frequently as they were with other methods"(p.18).

IV. LIMITATIONS OF PRIMARY TRAIT SCORING:

Despite the aforementioned strengths, there are several reasons for approaching primary trait scoring with caution. Primary Trait Scoring has several limitations:

1. **One Specific Trait:** The major drawback to this system is that papers are scored for **one specific primary trait** although the guide may have secondary traits. For example, Deborah Fuller's 1985 study suggests that some readers had difficulty focusing solely on the primary trait in the papers while disregarding students' performance in other areas. Her study suggests that if readers have, in fact, been affected by **secondary traits**, the influence would have been most evident in the upper half of the papers, thus resulting in a slightly higher score than the evaluation of the primary might have been (pp.283-284).

2. **Labor Intensive and Costly in its Development:** According to Lloyd-Jones (1977), developing " a scoring guide is labor intensive" (p.45). The list of what the guide includes is long. It includes: (a) the exercise itself; (b) the statement of the primary trait of the writing ,which should be elicited by the exercise (a purpose statement); (c) an interpretation of the exercise indicating how each element of the stimulus is presumed to affect the writer (a hypothesis); (d) a synthesis: an explanation of how the situation of the exercise is related to the posited primary trait; (e) the actual scoring guide: a system of defining the shorthand which is to be used in reporting descriptions of the writing; (f) definition of score points: samples of the papers which have been scored; (g) extensions of the definition: discussions of why each sample paper was scored as it was (Lloyd-Jones, 1975, p. 43; Walcott & Legg, 1998, p.94).

3. **Uninformed by current theory and research:** The scoring guides give no indication that, for example, the features that make a persuasive text seem well written may be different from those that make an expressive narrative seem well written. Consequently, these scoring guides provide us almost no help in working with students. This misuse of the label "Primary Trait" makes it difficult to develop consensus about the actual strengths and weaknesses of this approach to evaluation. (Odell,1993, p.99). Moreover, even the most used primary trait evaluation guides focus our attention on only certain types of strategies, ignoring others altogether. For instance, even those guides that identify specific persuasive strategies fail to help us understand the techniques students have used or might have used in, say, creating an introduction that engages the intended reader.

4. **Limited in scope:** It is not widely used in the classroom because teachers feel that it is too limited in scope to provide adequate feedback about students' writing. Teachers and assessment specialists point out that the inherent difficulty is scoring just <u>one</u> trait while at the same time attempting to ignore others. Exasperated raters usually make comments like this: "I could not understand the ideas because the grammar was so bad." They mentally rated the grammar and this mental rating too often finds its way into the score for content or for whatever trait they are supposed to be attending to. Thus, one has to be careful not to overload a trait with innumerable hidden sub-categories (Spandell, 1980, p. 5).

CONCLUSION:

Educators need to be familiar with the scoring options, weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each, and select the one that best fits the criteria and purpose of the program or course. In selecting the scoring option, educators should keep in mind that the use of writing samples necessitates obtaining at least **two samples** of more than **one kind** of a writing task that allows for revising and editing since a writer's writing will vary from day to day, assignment to assignment (Odell, 1987, p.108). Faculty can serve

as catalysts in seeking the best testing methods to measure competency in writing ability if they are informed of the advantages and disadvantages of the various available scoring options.

Accordingly, Primary Trait Scoring is based on the idea that different modes of discourse – expressive, persuasive, descriptive, and expository – place different demands on the writer in terms of audience and purpose. Besides, its focused nature means that scorings can be replicated quite closely and this approach can provide diagnostic information not available with the other scoring guides. In short, Primary Trait Scoring emphasizes depth over breadth. That is, readers have an in-depth portrait of the key trait the tasks are assessing. If a school district seeks in-depth data about students' performance in a specific discourse, then Primary Trait Scoring is valuable. If, on the other hand, broader information is sought, then Primary Trait Scoring would not be appropriate unless provisions were made for evaluating secondary traits as well.

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APPENDIX A

Source: Hawk and Cross, 1987, pp. 16-23.

— Confirmation of reliability and validity of instruments

— Composition scoring guides and writing prompts for each grade level

GRADE 2: COMPOSITION SCORING GUIDE

PRIMARY TRAIT: Description of a pet the writer has or would like to have.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	Contains a high degree of description. Reader can visualize the animal through the description.
3 =	Contains descriptive details yet lacks elaboration. Reader can visualize the animal through the description.
2 =	Contains some descriptive details related to the animal.
1 =	Does not contain descriptive details related to the animal.

SECONDARY TRAIT: Topic sentence or statement of main idea; at least two supporting details; a sense of closure.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	Contains a topic sentence or main idea and at least two supporting details; does not contain irrelevant information; contains a sense of closure.
3 =	Contains a topic sentence or main idea and at least two supporting details; does not contain irrelevant information.
2 =	Contains a topic sentence or main idea and at least two supporting details; may contain irrelevant details.
1 =	Contains no topic sentence or main idea. Titles do not count as a main idea.

TERTIARY TRAIT: Proper use of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	No consistent errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
3 =	Consistent errors in one of the areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
2 =	Consistent errors in two of the areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
1 =	Consistent errors in all areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

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TERTIARY TRAIT SCORING DIMENSION
GRADE 2

The following are dimensions to be scored for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

GRAMMAR:	(1) Complete sentences (fragments and run-ons are considered to be incorrect usage). (2) Subject/verb agreement.
SPELLING:	Correct spelling (incorrect use of the ampersand (&) for "and" is considered to be an error).
PUNCTUATION:	(1) Capitalization of first word in a sentence and proper nouns. (2) End punctuation. (3) Indention for a paragraph. (4) Apostrophes for contractions.

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GRADE 3: COMPOSITION SCORING GUIDE

PRIMARY TRAIT: Description of a place the writer would like to visit on a weekend.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	Contains sensory detail throughout. Papers may exhibit the use of figurative language.
3 =	Describes a single place using some degree of sensory detail. Paper may have details that are not strictly descriptive in nature.
2 =	Names where the writer likes to go and specifically explains what the writer does there and/or why the writer likes the place he has chosen.
1 =	Contains no specific focus on a single place. Instead, this paper may name several activities that the writer enjoys. This paper may contain description, but the description will not be about a specific place.

SECONDARY TRAIT: Organization of the information.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	Contains a topic sentence or statement of the main idea other than in title form. Has a variety of supporting ideas. Contains only information which is relevant to the stated topic sentence. Information is organized in a logical order and the paper has a sense of closure.
3 =	Contains the elements of 4 except that the paper will contain irrelevant information which does not directly support the topic sentence.
2 =	Contains the elements of 3 except that the writer will repeat the same basic supporting detail in different words rather than give new support to the topic sentence. However, this paper will have at least two different supporting ideas.
1 =	Contains no topic sentence or statement of main idea and/or has less than two different ideas which directly support the topic sentence.

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TERTIARY TRAIT: Proper use of grammar, spelling, and punctuation (see attached sheet).

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	No consistent errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
3 =	Consistent errors in two of the areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
2 =	Consistent errors in two of the areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
1 =	Consistent errors in all areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

TERTIARY TRAIT SCORING DIMENSIONS
GRADE 3

The following are dimensions to be scored for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

GRAMMAR:	(1) Complete sentences (fragments and run-ons are considered to be incorrect usage). (2) Subject/verb agreement.
SPELLING:	Correct spelling of words appropriate to grade level.
PUNCTUATION:	(2) Capitalization of first word in a sentence as the student constructs it regardless of whether the sentence is a fragment or a run-on. Capitalization of proper nouns. (2) Appropriate end punctuation. (3) Indention for a paragraph. (4) Correct use of apostrophes for contractions.

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GRADE 4: COMPOSITION SCORING GUIDE

PRIMARY TRAIT: Description of the writer's best friend and what he/she is like.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	Contains vivid description. Reader can visualize what best friend is like and tell something about his/her personality.
3 =	Contains descriptive details. Reader can tell something about the friend.
2 =	Contains some descriptive details related to the writer's best friend.
1 =	Does not contain descriptive details related to the writer's best friend.

SECONDARY TRAIT: Main idea stated. Details relate to topic. Contains at least three sentences.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	Main idea clearly stated. Details relate to topic. Contains three sentences. Contains closure.
3 =	Main idea stated. Details relate to topic. Contains at least three sentences.
2 =	Main idea may not be stated but details relate to the assigned topic. Contains at least two sentences. May not contain definite ending.
1 =	Contains no main idea or related details.

TERTIARY TRAIT: Proper use of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	No consistent errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. A single violation in any of these areas is not considered a consistent error.
3 =	Consistent errors in one of the areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
2 =	Consistent errors in two of the areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
1 =	Consistent errors in all areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

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TERTIARY TRAIT SCORING DIMENSIONS
GRADE 4

The following are dimensions to be scored for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

GRAMMAR: (1) Complete sentences (fragments and run-ons are considered to be incorrect usage). (2) Subject/ verb agreement.

SPELLING: Correct spelling (incorrect use of the ampersand (&) for "and" is considered to be an error.

PUNCTUATION: (1) Capitalization of first word in a sentence and proper nouns. (2) End punctuation. (3) Indention for a paragraph. (4) Apostrophes for contractions. (5) Commas for direct address and items in a serie.

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GRADE 5: COMPOSITION SCORING GUIDE

PRIMARY TRAIT: Description of what the writer would do if given $100.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	Contains vivid description. Contains varied sentence structure. Reader can visualize the results or actions through the description.
3 =	Contains descriptive details, yet lacks elaboration. Reader can visualize the results through the description (the way the money was spent).
2 =	Contains some descriptive details related to the results or actions taken.
1 =	Does not contain descriptive details related to the results or actions taken.

SECONDARY TRAIT: Organizational skills.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	Subject matter well organized. Main idea clearly stated. Details relate to topic. Evidence of transitional words or phrases. Contains at least three sentences. Comes to an identifiable logical ending.
3 =	Subject matter organized. Main idea stated. Details relate to topic. Contains at least two sentences. May not contain definite ending.
2 =	Main idea may not be stated but details relate to the assigned topic. Contains at least two sentences. May not contain definite ending.
1 =	Contains no main idea or related details.

TERTIARY TRAIT: Proper use of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Score Value	DESCRIPTION
4 =	No consistent errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. A single violation in any of these areas is not considered a consistent error.
3 =	Consistent errors in one of the areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
2 =	Consistent errors in two of the areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
1 =	Consistent errors in all areas listed, i.e., grammar, spelling, or punctuation.

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TERTIARY TRAIT SCORING DIMENSIONS
GRADE 5

The following are dimensions to be scored for grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

GRAMMAR: (1) Complete sentences (fragments and run-ons are considered to be incorrect usage). (2) Subject/verb agreement. (3) Consistency of tense. (4) Pronoun usage.

SPELLING: Correct spelling (incorrect use of the ampersand (&) for "and" is considered to be an error).

PUNCTUATION: (1) Capitalization of first word in a sentence and proper nouns. (2) End punctuation. (3) Indention for a paragraph. (4) Apostrophes for possessives and contractions. (5) Commas for direct address and items in a series.

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APPENDIX B

Source: "1987 Colorado Writing Assessment," 1987, pp. 9+
— Picture used for a story-writing task
— Scoring guides for the narrative and expository writing tasks
— Findings were satisfactory.

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Colorado Writing Assessment -- Expository

Primary Trait

0 = No response.

1 = *Do not define and defend a change.* Some "1" papers do not propose a change or identify a problem; they are simply statements of attitude, judgement, desire, or dissatisfaction. Other "1" papers do identify a problem or recommend a change, but do not explain how to implement the change or solve the problem. They do not tell how the school will be benefitted. An elaborately detailed description of a problem should not be scored higher than "1" if no solution is identified or defined. Lists of problems or changes are also scored as "1".

2 = *Define a change and offer minimal defense.* Respondents state a change they want made in their school or a problem that needs solving. In addition, they must tell: a) how to bring about the change or solve the problem; or b) an improvement that will result from the proposed change or solution. Some "2" papers do present all three elements, but the reasoning is not developed. Some are in a sketchy, skeletal, rudimentary form that is basically a bare outline. Others are disjointed or the ideas aren't related (solution doesn't solve the problem, benefit isn't related to the change, etc.).

3 = *Define and defend a change.* Papers state a change or identify a problem, explain how to bring about the change or solve the problem, and tell how the change will benefit the school. Reasoning is used to expand or explain at least one of the elements. For example, there might be a detailed plan for an elaborated explanation of the problem. Usually, one element is well developed while the others are only asserted or barely mentioned resulting in an unevenly developed paper. Occasionally, a "3" paper will contain an elaboration of a severe problem (drugs, gang wars, etc.) that implies the benefits without stating them.

4 = *Systematically define and defend a change.* These papers have all the elements of "3" papers. They are organized and controlled. At least two, and possibly all, of the elements are developed so that the various issues are related to each other and to the proposition.

5 = *Illegible, illiterate.*

8 = *Misunderstand the task, write on another topic.*

9 = *I don't know.*

Secondary Traits

Content

0 = No response.

1 = No supporting detail for any of the elements of the prompt, or only one element may be identified and supported.

2 = Supporting detail for at least one element of the prompt. Two or more elements must be identified.

3 = Vivid, concrete and complete supporting detail for the two or more elements of the prompt.

Expression

0 = No response.

1 = Many sentence formation problems.

2 = Few sentence formation errors but little variety -- sentences at very basic, simplistic level.

3 = Few sentence formation errors, but a variety of sentence structures used correctly.

Grammar / Mechanics/Spelling

0 = No response.

1 = Many errors that may interfere with meaning.

2 = Some errors that do not interfere with meaning.

3 = Few to no errors in grammar and mechanics; few to no errors in spelling.

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Colorado Writing Assessment -- Narrative

Primary Trait

0 = *No response.*

1 = *No evidence of storytelling.* These responses do not show evidence of storytelling. Thus, they either accumulate details without a situation to anchor and unite them, or they add just a few descriptive details to one of the situations provided in the stem.

2 = *Some evidence of storytelling.* These responses attempt the basic task of storytelling. They invent a situation to account for the bird, but the fictional demands are fundamentally unfulfilled for one of several reasons: a) the response may give the bare outline of a plot, with a beginning, middle, and end, but little or no elaboration of detail; b) the response may have no sense of a plot, but may simply ramble on from the initial situation with many details, but with no process or purpose to give it point or structure; c) the response may begin telling a story, but it never gets further than the beginning; or d) the response may relate several separate stories without connection between them.

3 = *Clear evidence of storytelling.* These responses clearly show evidence of the storyteller's obligation to structure a plot and elaborate it with appropriate details. Thus, they show a markedly greater sense of coherence with amplitude than "2" responses. But, they are usually somewhat flawed in one of the following ways: a) one or another part of the basic plot may be thinly or inconsistently detailed; b) the situation may be established, the plot developed, but the piece may come to an end without a clear or appropriate closure; c) the plot may be completely elaborated, but it contains technical inconsistencies in point-of-view, handling of dialogue, or management of narration.

4 = *Structured and complete storytelling.* These responses tell a complete story, amply as well as appropriately detailed at all points, and fully as well as consistently resolved. They exhibit tight control in the management of a whole fiction to provide context for the status of the bird.

7 = *Illegible, illiterate.*

8 = *Misunderstand the task; write on another topic.*

9 = *I don't know.*

Secondary Traits

Content

0 = No response.

1 = Story shows minimal originality -- predictable / unimaginative

2 = Story attempts originality -- an attempt to be original but not sustained or consistent throughout the story

3 = Story has originality which is sustained -- unique viewpoint or structure consistent throughout paper

Expression

0 = No response.

1 = Many sentence formation problems

2 = Few sentence formation errors but little variety -- sentences at very basic, simplistic level

3 = Few sentence formation errors, but a variety of sentence structures used correctly.

Grammar / Mechanics/Spelling

0 = No response.

1 = Many errors that interfere with meaning

2 = Many errors but they do not interfere with meaning

3 = Moderate or few errors.

Notes:

Spelling errors counted for basic words only, as readers do not know grade level.

A pure description paper will receive a primary trait score of "1" but is open to the full range of secondary trait points.

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LOOK AT THE PICTURE PRINTED BELOW FOR A WHILE AND THEN MAKE UP A STORY ABOUT IT. WHEN YOU ARE READY, WRITE YOUR STORY. IT MAY BE HELPFUL FOR YOU TO START WITH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING LINES, BUT YOU MAY BEGIN ANY WAY YOU WISH.

Possible First Lines

"I'm telling you, Henry, if you don't get rid of that thing, it's going to eat up the cat!"

"But, Mother, I am telling the truth! It laid an egg in the car."

"Last night a very odd-looking bird appeared in the neighborhood."

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APPENDIX C

Source: Holderer, 1994, pp. 18-19

- Successful predictive validity of the Modified Primary Trait Scoring guide
- Writing Prompt
- Modified Primary Trait Scoring guide

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The Modified Primary Trait Scoring Guide below was used at a community college in Kansas and corresponds to the following topic:

> Assume that someone your age has just moved into your city or town. Identify a good place to meet people of your age group, describe it, and tell why that place is good for him or her to meet friends.

THE MODIFIED PRIMARY TRAIT SCORING GUIDE:

Proficient Scores

6	Give this score to the essay that provides a clear, organized response to both parts of the question. It not only identifies and describes a good place to meet people of the student's age group, but it tells why that place is good for meeting people of that age group. The writer makes clear connections between his/her assertions and the reasons for these assertions by providing good explanations, illustrations, and connections to each of his or her assertions. The writer shows a good command of language and written conventions. If the essay shows a significant number of features similar to those listed in category 3, assign this paper a 3.
5	Give this score to the essay that responds to both parts of the question. (It identifies and describes a place to meet people of the student's age group and tells why that place is a good one.) However, the essay fails to adequately develop both parts of the question with sufficient explanations, illustrations, and connections. In spite of this lack of development, the essay is still logically organized. The essay may contain errors in structure and spelling (other than the major problems described in Category 3.) If the essay contains a significant number of features similar to those listed in Category 3, assign the paper a 3.
4	Give this score to the essay that seriously slights both parts of the question; however, in spite of its weaknesses, the student who wrote this response still has a chance for success in English Composition I. The essay may contain numerous errors, but none are the serious types described in Category 3. If the essay contains a significant number of features similar to those in Category 3, assign the paper a 2.

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Nonproficient Scores

3	Give this score to the essay that would meet the criteria of a 5 or 6 essay except that it contains one or more of the following features: Presence of true fragments in the response Significant sentence boundary errors (caused by misfired punctuation) Impacted or derailed sentences Significant errors in punctuation Strings of simple sentences (with or without "and") or other symptoms of safe writing Paragraphs that contain strings of topic sentences, sentences that just seem to be piled on top of each other, or sentences which do not logically follow each other Paragraphs that just seem to fall apart. Penmanship: Look for signs of <u>struggle</u> such as sloppy print, scrawly or loopy writing, misshaped letters, erratic capitalization any other signs that show weaknesses in motor skills. Do not confuse signs of struggle with <u>sloppy</u> handwriting.
2	Give this score to the essay that appears to meet the criteria for a 4 paper but it contains one or more of the problems described in Category 3.
1	Give this score to the essay that is so short (less than a half page of text on standard paper) that any reasonably accurate judgment of the writer's competence is impossible. The brevity of the response indicates that the student is completely non-fluent or suffers from writing anxiety. What is on the page is so poorly written that it almost lacks meaning.

The top-half descriptors (numbers 4-6 on the scale) direct readers to evaluate papers for idea development. The second sentence in each top-half descriptor (with the exception of number 4) is topic specific and can be modified to correspond to a change in topic. Otherwise, the scoring guide is topic independent.

The bottom-half score descriptors (1-3 on the scale) list those specific features that identify nonfluent writing Because these features are holistic in nature, the possible causes for them will work in tandem.

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